

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0926

March 9, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

I write seeking information about the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) contingency plans to address the 2019's coronavirus disease (COVID-19) potential impact on food and nutrition assistance for millions of American students.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued interim guidance for schools based on what is currently known about the transmission and severity of COVID-19. For institutions located in areas with confirmed COVID-19 cases, it is recommended that they speak with local health officials to determine whether it is necessary to cancel classes, and for how long. As of Tuesday, March 3rd, 2020, a handful of schools closed in response to distress over COVID-19 transmission. As the United States learns more about COVID-19 and brace for its spread, educational institutions across the country are developing emergency plans and communicating preventive procedures to their communities. Dr. Nancy Messonnier, director of the CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, stated that school closures would be one of the most effective measures local governments can take to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

I am concerned for our nation's students, who are at risk of being sequestered at home and potentially cut off from access to breakfast and lunch. Low-income families around the country rely on schools to provide the bulk of their children's daily nutrition. Should COVID-19 progress and institutions continue mandated dismissal, the implementation of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), the nation's second largest food and nutrition assistance program, will be severely impacted. Currently, the NSLP operates in nearly 100,000 public and nonprofit private schools and residential childcare institutions and provides low-cost or free lunches to 29.7 million children daily. An extended dismissal from school may prevent millions of children from accessing basic food assistance and put an additional strain on families across the nation.

Given the potential impact the spread of COVID-19 may present to students receiving food assistance from the NSLP, I ask for an immediate response to the following questions:

- What are the USDA's specific plans for ensuring students receive proper nutrition during extended school closures?
- Are there plans to provide prepared or prepackaged meals for children enrolled in the NSLP to help families provide food to their children during prolonged school closures?
- Has the USDA provided any guidance to NSLP recipients regarding the current situation? If not, is the USDA planning to do so, and when?

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



Debbie Mucarsel-Powell
Member of Congress